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Patient Attitudes to Sternotomy and Thoracotomy Scars

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Abstract

Background:

There are no data comparing patient attitudes to sternotomy and thoracotomy scars following surgery for congenital heart disease (CHD).

Methods:

Two hundred and one patients with a scar from CHD surgery (105 sternotomy, 36 thoracotomy, and 60 both scars) had a structured interview to explore attitudes to their scar.

Results:

Comparable proportions of each group reported that they did not like or hated their scar (23/105 [22 %] sternotomy, 9/36 [25 %] thoracotomy, 17/60 [28 %] both scars). Significantly more patients stated that they were embarrassed by and/or their choice of clothing was affected by a thoracotomy scar (20/36, 56 %) than those with a sternotomy scar (36/105, 34 %), $p = 0.04$. This was also seen when comparing sternotomy alone with both scars (36/105 [34 %] vs. 34/60 [57 %], $p = 0.008$).

Conclusions:

Adults who have undergone surgery for CHD are more likely to have a negative attitude to a thoracotomy than a sternotomy scar. Before a change in surgical approach is considered based on patient preferences, the acceptability and psychological impact of the different scars following surgery needs formal study.